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ABSTRACT

Current literature reveals that induction for beginning principals is often poorly planned or nonexistent. The purpose of this research, which examined induction practices for 112 randomly selected first-year elementary principals in Alabama, Mississippi, and South Carolina, was to study current induction programs, determine beginning principals' needs, and identify effective induction methods. Respondents ranked 10 areas of responsibility for first-year elementary principals in order of need for inclusion in induction programs. "Goal setting and planning" was ranked first, followed by "instruction and curriculum development." Respondents also identified which of 18 presented induction practices they had personally experienced and rated their effectiveness. Inservice workshops and professional association meetings, the most frequently used practices, were considered two of the least effective. The practices considered most effective (summer induction conference prior to the first year and mentoring with a veteran principal within the same district) were used infrequently. South Carolina principals experienced the greatest number of induction practices, followed by Alabama, then Mississippi principals. Larger school systems offered a significantly greater number of induction practices than did small school systems. Included are recommendations, an author abstract, and 27 references. (MLH)

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PERCEPTIONS OF FIRST-YEAR ELEMENTARY PRINCIPALS IN THREE SOUTHEASTERN STATES REGARDING PRINCIPAL INDUCTION PROGRAMS

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ABSTRACT

This study examined induction practices for first-year elementary principals in Alabama, Mississippi, and South Carolina. Current literature revealed that induction for beginning principals was often poorly planned or non-existent; therefore, the purpose of this study was to study current induction programs, to determine the needs of first-year elementary principals, and to identify effective induction methods.

A stratified random sample of 145 first-year elementary principals from Alabama, Mississippi, and South Carolina was selected. Members of the sample each received a survey instrument which was completed and returned by 112 of the principals surveyed.

Respondents ranked 10 areas of responsibility for first-year elementary principals in order of need for inclusion in induction programs. "Goal setting and planning" was chosen as the area with the greatest need for inclusion, followed by "instruction and curriculum development."

Respondents identified which of the 18 presented induction practices they had personally experienced. Respondents also indicated their perceptions of the effectiveness of each induction practice. "Inservice workshops" and "professional association meetings" were the most frequently used practices, however, these two practices were considered to be two of the least effective methods of

induction. The induction practices considered most effective, "summer induction conference prior to the first year" and "pairing (mentoring) with a veteran principal from within the principal's own school system," were used infrequently.

A chi-square test of homogeneity revealed that there was a significant difference in the number of induction practices offered in Alabama, Mississippi, and South Carolina. South Carolina principals experienced the greatest number of induction practices, followed by Alabama, then Mississippi principals.

Another chi-square test of homogeneity was utilized to determine if a significant difference existed in the number of induction practices offered in small and large school systems. Larger school systems offered a significantly greater number of induction practices than did small school systems.

The findings indicated that the induction practices considered most effective by beginning elementary principals were not being amply utilized. Conversely, ineffective induction practices were being used frequently.

Introduction

In the past, new elementary school principals have become administrators with very little prior experience and even less guidance after being hired. However, Daresh (1987) stated that "there is a significant amount of evidence that suggests . . . that the role of the principal is such an important one in terms of its impact on school effectiveness that it merits careful and continuous analysis" (p. 2).

According to Anderson (1990), "little educational research exists regarding the entry-year needs of beginning principals and the types of induction strategies common in public schools that help or hinder first-year principals' transition to school leadership" (p. 2). Daresh (1986) also noted that relatively few studies of the needs of beginning principals have been conducted during recent years.

In 1986, Daresh stated that there would most likely be a need for a substantial number of new principals in the foreseeable future. Four years later, Holcomb (1990a) noted that focusing on the principal's first year has become more important in recent years due to the fact that nearly one third of the nation's principals planned to retire in the next three years, and 65% will have left the field by the year 2000.

Assisting new principals during their first year has been a vital need for many years, but only recently has

begun to be addressed. Duke (1987) stated "The first days and months of the principalship are critical to the process of shaping school leaders" (p. 49), and what has happened during an individual's first year as principal has exerted "a major influence on his or her subsequent performance" (p. 49).

The Alabama Leadership in Educational Administration Development (LEAD) Academy (1992) found that first-year principals often experienced pressure and feelings of uncertainty and isolation that affected their performance and success. New principals needed training in essential leadership and management skills as well as support through collegial relationships with experienced and successful administrators and through professional networks designed for sharing ideas and resources.

Statement of the Problem

A review of the literature revealed that induction for beginning principals was often poorly planned or non-existent. Several studies focused on secondary principals, but very few researchers had examined the induction needs of elementary principals. There was a need for research to be conducted which addressed the total induction needs of first-year elementary principals.

Purpose of the Study

The first purpose of this study was to examine current first-year principal induction practices in public

elementary schools in Alabama, Mississippi, and South Carolina. A second purpose of the study was to determine the perceptions of first-year elementary principals regarding the need for inclusion of different administrative responsibilities in induction programs. Finally, the third purpose of this study was to determine the perceptions of first-year elementary principals regarding the effectiveness of various induction practices.

Methodology

Using information from the State Department of Education and the Leaders in Educational Administration Development (LEAD) Academies in each of the three states, the following population was identified: 71 Alabama, 80 Mississippi, and 31 South Carolina first-year elementary principals. Principals of schools with at least two grade levels within the kindergarten to sixth grade range were considered elementary principals.

Survey instruments were mailed to 145 principals; of these, 127 were returned, for a response rate of 88%. Of the 112 survey instruments which were returned and were usable, 41 (37%) were from Alabama, 48 (43%) were from Mississippi, and 23 (20%) were from South Carolina.

Demographic Information

The largest number of principals (46.4%) supervised students in kindergarten through fifth grade. This grouping was dominant in each of the three states. Twenty percent of

the principals supervised kindergarten through sixth grade and 9.8% of the principals supervised kindergarten through third grade. Principals who supervised either kindergarten through eighth grade, kindergarten through twelfth grade or grades four through eight were equal with 8% of the principals in each group.

The majority (57.7%) of the respondents operated schools with student populations of 400 or more. The other 42.3% of the principals had school enrollments of less then 400. In all three states, less than 45% of the principals were in schools with enrollments of less than 400.

Most principals (78.6%) were approved by the Board of Education as principals between the months of May and August. Only 21.4% of the principals were approved between September and April. Female principals (63.4%) outnumbered males (36.6%). African American principals represented 38.4% of the respondents, while Caucasians were the largest group with 58.9%. Respondents who marked "Other" as their race equalled 2.7%. None of the principals were Asian American or Hispanic. Fifty-seven percent of the respondents were between the ages of 41 and 50. Principals between the ages of 31 and 40 represented 29.5% of the respondents. Twelve percent of the principals were between the ages of 51 and 60, while only 1.8% were between the ages of 21 and 30.

Alabama principals differed from those in the other two states in that the majority (36.6%) worked in large school systems with more than 20 elementary principals. Most of the principals (46.4%) were from small school systems with only one to five elementary principals employed in their school district. The percentage of respondents from school districts with 6 to 10 elementary principals and school districts with more than 20 elementary principals was equal (21.4%). Respondents who came from school districts with 11 to 15 elementary principals in their school system equalled 6.3% while only 4.5% came from districts with 16 to 20 elementary principals.

A large number of respondents (32.1%) had never served in an assistant principalship. However, the largest number (50.9%) had served as assistant principals for one to five years. Principals who had served 6 to 10 years as assistant principals equalled 10.7%, while only 2.7% had served as assistant principals for 11 to 15 years, and only 3.6% had served in this capacity for 16 or more years.

The largest number of principals (74.1%) had accumulated 16 or more years of professional education experience. Eighteen percent had 11 to 15 years experience in education and eight percent had six to ten years experience. None of the principals surveyed had less than six years professional experience in education. All three states had very similar percentages in this category.

Based on demographic information obtained through use of the survey instrument, the typical first-year elementary principal represented in this study had the following characteristics:

1. Was a white, female between the ages of 41 and 50;
2. Supervised a school with a student population of 400 or more kindergarten through fifth grade students;
3. Worked in a small school district with one to five elementary principals;
4. Had served as an assistant principal for one to five years; and
5. Had 16 or more years of professional experience in education.

Induction Information

Principals rated ten areas of responsibility from 1 to 10 in order of importance for inclusion in an induction program for first-year principals. Table 1 indicates the order in which each area of responsibility was ranked as the area having the greatest need for inclusion in induction programs for beginning principals. The largest percentage of the respondents (35.1%) listed "goal setting and planning" as their top choice. Second in importance was "instruction and curriculum development" (19.8).

Respondents also chose 5 of the 18 induction practices which they believed to be most effective and ranked these

practices from one to five in order of effectiveness. Table 2 depicts the resulting rankings.

"Summer induction conference prior to the first year" was chosen by 20.5% of the respondents as the most effective induction practice. Several induction practices were not

Table 1

Area of Responsibility Having the Greatest Need for Inclusion in Beginning Principal Induction Programs

Rank	Area of Responsibility	n	%
1	Goal-setting and planning	39	(35.1)
2	Instruction and curriculum development	22	(19.8)
3	Following policy guidelines and legal mandates	14	(12.6)
4	Time management	10	(9.0)
5	Conflict management	8	(7.2)
5	School finance and business management	8	(7.2)
6	Maintaining student discipline	4	(4.5)
7	Faculty/staff supervision and evaluation	2	(1.8)
7	Working with parents	2	(1.8)
8	Building and plant management	1	(0.9)

chosen by any of the respondents as most effective: (a) "consultant services", (b) "pairing with a retired

Table 2

Most Effective Induction Practice

Practice	n	%
Summer induction conference prior to first year	23	(20.5)
Pairing (mentoring) with a veteran principal from within your own school system	20	(17.9)
Internship under another administrator	14	(12.5)
Orientation sessions with school district officers	11	(9.8)
Orientation with outgoing principal	9	(8.0)
Development of a plan for professional growth	8	(7.1)
Inservice workshops	8	(7.1)
Professional needs assessment followed by seminars and training in areas of need	7	(6.3)
Peer group problem solving and idea sharing	4	(3.6)
Pairing (mentoring) with a veteran principal from outside your own school system	3	(2.7)
Collegial observation and reflective feedback	2	(1.8)
Structured work load to allow time for induction activities	2	(1.8)
Collegial support groups	1	(0.9)

principal", (c) "professional association meetings", (d) "shadowing", and (e) "social activities with other principals".

"Inservice workshops" were being experienced by 91.1% of all the respondents. This induction practice was also the predominant practice in all three states. Induction practices experienced by the entire sample are presented in Table 3.

An examination of the induction experiences of the entire sample revealed that the most frequently used

induction practices were not considered to be the most effective.

Table 3

Percentage of Total Sample Experiencing Induction Practices

Practice	n	%
Inservice workshops	102	(91.1)
Professional association meetings	92	(82.1)
Social activities with other principals	79	(70.5)
Orientation sessions with school district officers	78	(69.6)
Peer group problem solving and idea sharing	69	(61.6)
Development of a plan for professional growth	68	(61.3)
Orientation with outgoing principal	66	(58.9)
Collegial support groups	55	(49.1)
Professional needs assessment followed by seminars and training in areas of need	51	(45.5)
Collegial observation and reflective feedback	49	(43.8)
Internship under another administrator	48	(42.9)
Pairing (mentoring) with a veteran principal from within your own school system	47	(42.0)
Summer induction conference prior to first year	35	(31.2)
Structured work load to allow time for induction activities	29	(25.9)
Consultant services	23	(20.5)
Pairing (mentoring) with a veteran principal from outside your own school system	23	(20.5)
Shadowing	12	(10.8)
Pairing (mentoring) with a retired principal	7	(6.3)

Note. N = 112.

Tests of Hypotheses

Two null hypotheses were tested through the use of the chi-square test of homogeneity. The significance level to

determine if a difference existed related to the hypotheses was established at the .05 level. The hypotheses have been stated below along with a discussion of the analysis of data related to each hypothesis.

Null Hypothesis 1

There will be no significant difference in the number of induction experiences offered to beginning elementary principals in Alabama, Mississippi, and South Carolina.

Data from the total sample were used to analyze Null Hypothesis 1. The total number of yes responses in Section III of the questionnaire was computed by state and utilized as the observed frequency. The total number of observed induction experiences being offered in Alabama was 345. This number was larger than the expected number of induction experiences being offered in Alabama (340.96).

South Carolina also had a larger (243) than expected (191.79) number of induction experiences being offered. A smaller (345) than expected (400.25) number of induction experiences were being offered in Mississippi. The critical value of chi-square at the .05 level of significance with 2 degrees of freedom was determined to be 5.9991 (Hinkle et al., 1988, p. 651). The computed value of chi square was 39.777. Since the computed chi-square value of 39.777 was greater than the critical value, the null hypothesis was rejected.

Therefore, there was evidence to suggest that significant differences existed between the number of induction experiences currently being offered in the three states of Alabama, Mississippi, and South Carolina.

Null Hypothesis 2

There will be no significant difference in the number of induction experiences offered in small and large school systems.

For analyzing Null Hypothesis 2, the demographic information regarding the number of elementary principals employed by a school district was dichotomized. Large school systems were identified by collapsing four response categories into a single category which included school systems with six or more elementary principals. Small school systems were identified as those having one to five elementary principals. A larger (531) than expected (500.32) number of induction experiences were offered in large school systems. However, a smaller (402) than expected (432.68) number of induction experiences were offered in small school systems.

Data from the total sample were used to analyze Null Hypothesis 2. The critical value of chi-square at the .05 level of significance with 1 degree of freedom was determined to be 3.841 (Hinkle et al., 1988, p. 651). The computed value of chi square was 7.559. Because the computed chi-square value of 7.559 was greater than the

critical value, the null hypothesis was rejected. Therefore, there was evidence to suggest that significant differences existed in the number of induction experiences currently being offered in small and large school systems.

The chi-square data relative to the two hypotheses are indicated in Table 4. As noted, both null hypotheses were rejected.

Table 4

Results of Chi-Square Analysis of Hypotheses

Hypothesis	df	Critical value of chi-square	Obtained chi-square
1	2	5.9991	39.777*
2	1	3.841	7.559*

*p .05.

Conclusions

Demographics

This study revealed that Caucasian females dominated the field of first-year principals. The number of African Americans holding principalships was significant, however, representation among other racial groups was virtually inconsequential. The shortage of minorities in the field of education as a whole certainly contributed to their scarce

presence in principalships. The small percentage of males represented in administration could have been due in part to the lack of like-gender mentors at the elementary level as well as the small number of male teachers at the elementary level.

An encouraging finding of this study was that the majority of new principals were between the ages of 41 and 50 and had more than 16 years of experience in education. This trend indicated the possible entry of more mature and more experienced candidates into the administrative arena.

Recognition of the assistant principalship as a training ground for the principalship was established due to the fact that 69% of the respondents had served in this capacity. Important to note, however, was the fact that 32% of the principals had not received this same valuable training experience. This latter statistic demonstrated the great need for active support for new principals during their first year.

Research Question 1

Which topics did first-year elementary principals rank as most important for inclusion in induction programs for new principal appointees?

"Goal setting and planning" was clearly identified in this study as the responsibility area most requiring induction emphasis. Few studies in the literature had similarly identified "goal setting and planning" as an

important topic in beginning principal induction programs. Several studies did not even mention this area as one needing to be addressed through induction (Daresh, 1986; Hickey, 1987; Kelly, 1983; Spradling, 1989).

Rogus and Drury (1988) alluded to planning in their study of secondary school administrators when they identified "organizing to address daily, monthly, and yearly routines" as 1 of 12 induction needs. Anderson (1991) included "setting goals and developing long-range plans" as an administrative task requiring assistance, although this task was listed 13th in order of importance. The Danforth Foundation preservice preparation program for principals (Playko & Daresh, 1988) considered "strategic and operational planning" to be a critical topic for prospective principals.

Cheever, Fisher, Jones, Kelleher, and Woffard (1982) stated that "many administrators get off to bad starts because they immediately begin to 'solve problems' or 'make changes' before planning and executing a set of activities which force them to learn more about the system and test their assumptions before trying to change or direct it" (p. 5). This phenomenon appeared to be true in the case of the participants in this study, indicated by the increased importance beginning principals placed on goal setting and planning.

This study also supported Alvy and Coladarci (1985) and Hickey's (1987) findings that instruction and curriculum was an area in which principals wanted to spend much of their time. The fact that principals who had served as assistant principals chose "instruction and curriculum development" as the area of greatest need may have been influenced by the reality that assistant principals were rarely assigned any instructional duties. The responses of first-year principals participating in this study who had previously served as assistant principals indicated that they had not been assigned responsibilities as assistant principals that they would be expected to perform as principals.

The fact that new principals with less than 11 years of experience in education expressed a strong need for induction in the areas of "school finance and business management" and "faculty/staff supervision and evaluation" was not surprising. The greater the number of years in the profession, the more likely that a teacher would have been exposed to activities in both of these areas and, therefore, have a better understanding of them.

The four areas identified with the least need for inclusion were "building and plant management," "working with parents," "faculty/staff supervision and evaluation," and "maintaining student discipline." The possibility existed that new principals have delegated these responsibilities to custodial staff, department heads,

assistant principals, or others, and therefore did not view these as areas in which they personally need help.

Research Question 2

Which induction practices did first-year elementary principals believe would be most effective in meeting their needs as new administrators?

The induction practice considered to be most effective in this study, "pairing (mentoring) with a veteran principal from within your own school system," was well supported in the literature. Anderson (1990) found that principals considered assignment of a veteran district administrator to assist a new principal "learn the informal ropes" during the first year on the job a needed induction strategy. (p. 5)

Several studies cited principal induction programs which utilized mentoring: (a) The Indiana Principal Leadership Academy (Ellsberry, 1990; Rodriguez, 1989); (b) The Human Resource Management and Development plan in Florida (Mosrie, 1990); (c) Rogus & Drury's (1988) three-pronged principal induction model; (d) Kentucky's Beginning Principal Intern Program (White & Swezig, 1989); (e) The Louisiana Leadership in Educational Administration Project (Keaster, 1990; Licata & Ellett, 1990); and (f) The Danforth Foundation preservice preparation program for principals (Playko & Daresh, 1988).

Mentoring was specifically mentioned as an induction technique by three different respondents who replied to an

open-ended question regarding their personal views on induction. One principal from Alabama stated "opportunities should be established for working with successful mentoring principals." Another principal from Mississippi specified that induction programs should "be structured to require at least two months of mentoring with a veteran principal within the new principal's district." Finally, a third principal responded that induction programs should "include at least a year of internship with an experienced administrator who doesn't mind sharing his/her expertise."

The fact that Caucasian principals selected mentoring as the most effective induction practice while African Americans chose another technique may be due to the lack of like-race mentors. This study established that Caucasians currently outnumbered African Americans significantly in the field of elementary administration in the three states studied; therefore, the presence of African American mentors who would have encouraged other African Americans was lacking.

The selection of "summer induction conference prior to first year" as one of the most effective induction practices was very logical. Since 79% of the principals surveyed were hired between May and August, they probably viewed the summer months as valuable time in which to learn as much about their new job as possible. As a principal from Alabama stated, "[induction programs should] begin the day

you accept the job and continue at least monthly during the first two years."

"Shadowing" was considered to be one of the least effective induction practices in this study. Richardson and Prickett (1991) also found that participants in the Kentucky Beginning Principal Intern Program considered shadowing to be ineffective.

Research Question 3

Which induction practices were being experienced most frequently by first-year elementary principals?

Contradictions in the types of induction practices most commonly experienced and the effectiveness of those practices were found. "Inservice workshops" were experienced more often than any other induction practice yet they were ranked 17th in effectiveness out of 18 induction practices. In the same manner, "social activities with other principals" was the third most commonly experienced practice, yet it was ranked 15th out of the 18 induction practices in effectiveness.

"Summer induction conference prior to the first year" was experienced by only 35 of the 112 respondents in this study. Incongruity existed again in this instance due to the fact that the majority of respondents selected this practice as most effective. Because 79% of the new principals were hired between the months of May and August, this induction practice could be easily implemented.

The induction practice which received the highest mean ranking was "pairing (mentoring) with a veteran principal from within your own school system." Even though the use of this technique was well documented in the literature, as indicated previously, only 47 principals in this study had experienced this type of mentoring.

It was apparent that school systems were utilizing induction practices which were not considered effective by beginning principals. One explanation could be that school systems have failed to prioritize the planning and implementation of these induction programs in a systematic fashion. An additional explanation could be that effective partnerships between school districts and universities to establish well-developed induction programs have not been actively pursued. Central to the problem of inadequate induction for principals was the fact that such programs were not based on empirical research.

Even though universities and professional associations have made valuable contributions to the induction process (Bass, 1990; Licata & Ellett, 1988), principals have not received the continued support necessary to make their first year rewarding. A principal from Mississippi conveyed this idea well by stating that ". . . the new principal needs to have support, to be able to talk things out, and have a 'sounding board' where she can explore alternatives without fear of repercussions."

Null Hypothesis 1

South Carolina principals not only experienced more induction practices than principals in Alabama and Mississippi, but more than 50% of the South Carolina principals were exposed to the three induction practices which were rated most effective. A comment received from one South Carolina principal illustrated the effectiveness of this state's induction program: "The networking system established in South Carolina for new principals has been invaluable. We have bonded by meeting three times a year and remain in contact during the year. It's very refreshing to share the new experience of principalship."

It was significant, however, to note that other factors within the local school system could negate the effectiveness of a good induction program. Another principal from South Carolina noted that "too much emphasis was placed on my portfolio evaluation and too little on supporting me through the year from hell." Obviously, the outside support that could be received through the networking system was not effective when support was lacking within the local school system.

Comments from principals in Mississippi indicated inadequacies in the induction programs they experienced. One respondent stated, "I came into a 612 student (K-1) school with a faculty and staff of 65+ people for whom I was responsible, with no prior training and no help. 'Sink or

swim' was the attitude at Central Office. I'm swimming." Another respondent commented, "I had little to no help and it has been a hard year."

Null Hypothesis 2

Understandably, large school systems offered a significantly greater number of induction experiences than small school systems. The literature gave suggestions for overcoming this problem. Rogus and Drury (1988) suggested that small school systems establish a cooperative agreement with a university which could provide other means of assisting beginning principals. Lyons (1992) recommended combining two or more school districts into a single educational service unit to offer cooperative programs for the orientation of new principals.

Almost 50% of the principals in this study worked in school systems with less than six elementary principals. Many of the school systems represented would probably find it necessary to join forces with others to provide quality induction programs for new principals. Since the largest percentage of principals in Alabama (37%) came from school systems with more than 20 elementary principals, providing quality induction programs without outside help in Alabama would have been more feasible than in Mississippi or South Carolina where the majority of the principals were employed in small school districts.

Recommendations

The study of induction for first-year elementary principals has just begun and should continue for many years to come. Researchers desiring to replicate or expand this study should be aware of a particular difficulty experienced by this researcher as well as others cited in the literature. Fowler & Gettys (1989), Hall & Mani (1989), and this researcher all experienced great difficulty in identifying first-year principals. Of the seven southeastern states initially to be included in this study, only three could provide the information to develop a list of first-year elementary principals.

Based upon information accumulated in this study, the following recommendations are made:

1. The State Department of Education in each state should maintain a centralized data base of information on all new principals appointed each year.

2. The Leadership in Educational Administration Development Academy or comparable organizations in each state should also maintain a centralized data base of information on all new principals appointed each year.

3. Further research should be conducted to identify specific differences in induction needs of new principals based on race, age, gender, and previous educational experience.

4. The State Departments of Education in both Alabama and Mississippi should examine the induction programs currently being offered to determine their effectiveness.

5. Research and study should be conducted concerning management induction programs in business and industry. The appropriateness of using these programs in education should be analyzed.

6. Local boards of education, superintendents, and personnel directors should examine and analyze the results of this study for the purpose of improving beginning principal induction programs.

7. Local school systems should examine the structure of the assistant principal's job description for the purpose of utilizing this position as a training ground for the principalship.

8. Those responsible at the state level for induction programs for assistant principals and principals should examine and analyze the results of this study for the purpose of improving induction programs.

9. Summer induction conferences prior to a principal's first year should be considered strongly as a means of inducting new elementary principals.

10. Further research and study should be conducted to determine the most effective induction practices for use with principals of varying backgrounds.

11. Further research to support and refine the findings of this study would be beneficial both for its practical implications for educational administrators and for its methodological implications for local school systems.

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